

This checklist will help installation representatives effectively handle complaints about noise and other public concerns. Whether speaking in front of a group of neighborhood residents or answering the installation's complaint hotline, effective communication is essential.

DO:

- ☐ Speak to complainants in person—Do not rely solely on any written complaints or records of conversations.
- ☐ Give your name.
- ☐ Get their details, e.g. names, addresses, telephone numbers, dates.
- ☐ Tell them you are recording their complaint, and write down what they say.
- ☐ Let complainants have their say.
- ☐ Listen.
- ☐ Take complainants seriously.
- ☐ Accept complaints even if they are not about military activities.
- ☐ Treat the complainant with genuine empathy, courtesy, patience, honesty, and fairness.
- ☐ If they are angry, let them vent; do not interrupt them.
- ☐ Stay calm even if the complainant gets angry.
- ☐ You don't have to agree, but show empathy with their concern: "I hear what you are saying."
- ☐ Demonstrate to complainants that you clearly understand the full nature of their problem by:
 - ☐ Listening—Do not jump to conclusions, apportion blame, or become defensive.
 - ☐ Asking questions to clarify the situation.
 - ☐ Repeating what the speaker said or summarizing your understanding of the problem.
- ☐ Thank complainants for raising their problems with you.
- ☐ End any phone conversation or community meeting with the lines of communication open.

Effectively handling complaints

- ☐ Act quickly once complainants have left the building or hung up the phone.

"When it comes right down to it, other things being relatively equal, the human dynamic is more important than the technical dimensions of the deal."

Stephen R. Covey,
The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

DON'T:

- ☐ Talk or explain—just listen.
- ☐ Agree or disagree, accept or deny—simply record what they are saying and summarize.
- ☐ Deter people from making a complaint.
- ☐ Ask them to complain in writing or in person or call back later.
- ☐ Argue, commiserate, or offer any promises.
- ☐ Get angry or become defensive.
- ☐ Consider the complaint as a personal criticism.
- ☐ Pass the complainant on to another person.
- ☐ Accept abuse (e.g., swearing) from a complainant.
- ☐ Use jargon when writing back to the complainant.

Successfully handling complaints requires listening with empathy and responding accurately and quickly.

Generally, you should make it easy for the complainant to raise problems with you. Encourage ongoing, open communication when advertising the complaint phone number and/or Web site and in written responses to complainants. Say something like, “The installation welcomes comments from the community” and “Every effort will be made to correct problems, mission permitting.”

Management of your complaint system is also important. Make sure someone is available to answer the complaint phone calls, and have one person designated to manage problems that require follow-up.

For help with the Army’s noise management community involvement activities, contact:

Operational Noise Program
U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine
MCHB-TS-EON
Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21010-5403
410-436-3829
<http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/dehe/morenoise/>

For help with the Navy’s noise management community involvement activities, contact:

Special Assistant for AICUZ and Encroachment
Commander Navy Installations
Naval Facilities Engineering Command
Washington Navy Yard, Washington DC 20374
202-685-9181

For help with the Air Force’s noise management community involvement activities, contact:

AICUZ/Noise Program Manager
Bases and Units Branch
HQ USAF/ILEPB
1260 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330.
703-604-5277

For help with the Marine Corp’s noise management community involvement activities, contact:

Community and Land Use Planner for AICUZ
Headquarter Marine Corps
Washington DC, 20380-1775
703-695-8240, ext 3350